

Agriculture Commissioner Meg Scott Phipps, after admitting in court to an illegal campaign fund-raising conspiracy, was convicted, a News and Observer staff writer, Amy Gardner, wrote as follows: “There was one bright note to Meg Scott Phipps’ conviction Thursday: It was a rarity in the annals of North Carolina politics. No statewide officeholder has been convicted of committing a crime while in office, according to political experts contacted after the verdict.”

Several of such experts quoted are here this afternoon, and here is how they explained their conclusion to Ms. Gardner: long-time UNC Professor and distinguished Director of the Institute of Government John Sanders said: “Trading the exercise of one’s official authority for money, whether it’s for electoral or personal profit, is about as bad as it gets in a position like that. We have tended to elect people of sufficient honesty and good behavior that they don’t get into that kind of trouble.” Ferrel Guillory, highly-respected journalist and now, happy for us, Director of UNC’s Program on Southern Politics, Media and Public Life, said “the structure of government and the state’s ‘Protestant rectitude’ have insulated it from wrongdoing.” He explained: “The governor of North Carolina is weak: He had no veto power until 1997; nine other statewide elected officials control huge agencies, including public education, agriculture, the state treasury, and the State Bureau of Investigation; and lawmakers control hundreds of appointments to influential boards and commissions. That structure diffuses power and allows independent agencies to monitor one another. We’ve not been immune from partisanship, racial divides, more power in the hands of the wealthy than in the poor. We’re not different from America from that standpoint, but the political and civic culture has made the political soil inhospitable to out-and-out corruption. If anything, Phipps’ misdeeds and conviction will improve the chances that North Carolina politicians will continue to behave. It is really sad. It’s hurtful to the state’s body politic to have something like this happen, particularly with a member of a historic family. But it is more of an aberration than a pattern.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The News & Observer  
(hereinafter “N&O”)  
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